
MEMORANDUM

TO: MEMBERS, STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

FROM: ROBERT FRANCIOSI, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGES TO AZ LEARNS FOR 2009

DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2009

This memo describes the proposed changes to the AZ LEARNS formula for 2009. They are:

1. Move baseline for aggregate growth to 2006.
2. Remove AYP from the AZ LEARNS formula.
3. Updating the rules for the graduation/dropout rates.
4. Updating the calculation of profiles for alternative schools.
5. Specifying the AZ LEARNS scale for K12 schools that do not have points from MAP, or grad/dropout rates.

MOVE BASELINE TO 2006

The AZ LEARNS evaluation awards points to schools based on improvement in the percentage of students passing AIMS. Improvement is measured as average year-to-year gain from a baseline year to the current year.

Last year the baseline year for the aggregate growth measure was set at 2005 by board policy. It is proposed that the baseline be moved to 2006. There are two reasons 2006 better serves as a baseline year: 1) It was the first year the use of alternate accommodations was discontinued by the majority of schools; 2) it was the first year the test used for ELL classification was uniform across the state. If the baseline year is set at 2006, the intent is to have 2006 remain the baseline year.

The table below shows the impact of the proposed change.

Impact of 2006 Baseline		
Profile	Actual 2008	2006 Baseline
Underperforming	10.7%	8.7%
Performing	33.9%	32.5%
Performing Plus	22.4%	25.7%
Highly Performing	14.4%	14.4%
Excelling	18.6%	18.6%

REMOVE AYP FROM THE AZ LEARNS FORMULA

Originally, NCLB's requirement for a single accountability system was interpreted to mean that AZ LEARNS had to be linked in some way to AYP. Thus, the AZ LEARNS formula awards a point to a school if it made AYP.

The Department obtained clarification from US ED on this issue. The "single system" requirement applies to AYP (i.e. a state can't calculate AYP one way for one group of schools and a second way for another.) Although US ED would like states to incorporate components of AYP in any state system, the law does not currently require that state systems account for or incorporate AYP.

To simplify the AZ LEARNS evaluation, the Department proposes removing the point awarded for making AYP. To compensate for the loss of a potential point, the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), the measure of student-level growth, will receive greater weight.

Currently, AZ LEARNS awards points for student-level growth based on the following formula:

$$\text{Points earned} = 5.2 + 0.22 \times (\text{School's growth index}).$$

The school's growth index is the average of student growth at the school measured against expected growth. A school whose students, on average, meet their expected growth targets will have a growth index of 0, and hence earn 5.2 points. Schools whose students exceed expected growth will earn more points, schools whose students fall short of expected growth will earn less.

The Department proposes to give greater weight to the MAP by modifying the formula to:

$$\text{Points earned} = 5.9 + 0.22 \times (\text{School's growth index}).$$

The proposed formula would award 0.7 more points at each value of the growth index. For example, a school with a growth index of 0 would earn 5.9 points instead of 5.2.

ADE proposes adjusting the AZ LEARNS performance level scales for schools that do not receive MAP points (high schools and K-3 schools). The proposed new scales are:

Proposed AZ LEARNS Scales without AYP				
Profile	Elementary w/o MAP		High School	
	Current	Proposed	Current	Adjusted
Underperforming	<8	<7.7	<9.6	<9.4
Performing	8	7.7	9.6	9.4
Highly Performing	13	12.1	15	14.7
Excelling	15	14.1	17	16.5
Total Points	20	19	22	21

The table below shows the impact of the proposed change.

Impact of Eliminating AYP from AZ LEARNS		
Profile	Actual 2008	No AYP
Underperforming	10.7%	8.7%
Performing	33.9%	37.3%
Performing Plus	22.4%	21.1%
Highly Performing	14.4%	14.6%
Excelling	18.6%	18.2%

UPDATING THE RULES FOR THE GRADUATION/DROPOUT RATES

Currently in the AZ LEARNS formula, a high school may earn one point for meeting the goal for the graduation rate and one point for meeting the goal for the dropout rate. Schools may earn a point by meeting the target—90 percent for the grad rate, 6 percent for the dropout rate—or by showing sufficient growth measured against the baseline year. The amount of growth needed is contingent on the school's graduation/dropout rate in the baseline year.

The policy governing the calculation of these points has not been updated since 2003. They are badly in need of updating and clarification. Below are the proposed changes.

1. **For grad rate the baseline year is 2006 or the school's first year serving 12th grade, whichever is latest. For dropout rate, the baseline year is 2006 or its first year of operation, whichever is latest.** Current policy sets the baseline year at 2000, and does not specify what the baseline is for schools that have opened after 2000. 2006 is the first year that the grad rate was calculated using SAIS.
2. **The amount of growth needed is contingent on current year rate.** Schools that do not meet the grad/dropout rate targets may still earn points if they show growth. Current policy sets the growth target based on the school's grad/dropout rate in the baseline year. This can lead in subsequent years to schools with identical grad/dropout rates having different growth targets.
3. **The required growth is annual average growth calculated as:**

$$\text{Avg. Annual Growth} = \frac{\text{Current Rate} - \text{Baseline Rate}}{\text{Number of Years}}$$

This simplifies the calculation, and makes it more valid. Currently, a three year average is compared to the baseline year.

4. **A school will not be evaluated on grad rate until it serves 12th grade for two years.**
5. **The minimum cohort/group size is 15.** Current policy specifies no minimum group size.

6. **Schools not evaluated on graduation rate will receive double the number of points earned via the dropout rate.** Current policy does not specify what to do for high schools with no grad rate.
7. **Schools not evaluated on the dropout rate will receive double the number of points earned via the graduation rate.**

The table below shows the impact of the proposed changes on the number of points earned by high schools.

Impact of Updating Grad/Dropout Rules			
	Percent of Schools Earning:		
	0 points	1 point	2 points
Total Points Proposed Rules	12%	34%	54%
Total Points 2008	19%	16%	65%

UPDATING THE CALCULATION OF PROFILES FOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

As required by state law, schools that have applied for and been granted alternative status receive a “parallel” AZ LEARNS profile. The policy governing the calculation of these profiles has not been updated since 2004. The proposed changes below bring the calculation of alt-school profiles into line with that for other schools.

1. **Points earned via AIMS will be averaged across subjects rather than summed.** Current policy sums points earned across all subjects and grades, consequently the number of potential points varies by the number of grades served. This change incorporates a simplification of the formula applied to other schools in 2005.

Example. Suppose a school serves grades 8-12. AZ LEARNS treats grades 9-12 as a single grade, so under current policy the points earned via AIMS is calculated in the following manner. The values for each grade and subject are hypothetical out of a total of six possible.

Points Earned via AIMS: Current Policy				
Grade	Math	Reading	Writing	
8	2	2	2	
9-12	3	2	1	
Total	5	4	3	
Overall Total				12

Under the proposed change, the points earned would be calculated in the following manner.

Points Earned via AIMS: Current Policy				
Grade	Math	Reading	Writing	
8	2	2	2	
9-12	3	2	1	
Average	2.5	2	1.5	
Overall Total				6

2. **The number of points needed for a profile of “performing” is 6.** Under current policy, alternative schools may not earn a profile higher than performing. The points needed to earn a performing profile depend on the number of grades and subjects evaluated.
3. **The dropout rate will be evaluated for all schools.**
4. **AYP will not be included in the evaluation.**
5. **Schools serving both elementary/middle and high school grades will receive a single profile.**

The proposed changes would have no impact on current alt-school profiles.

AZ LEARNS SCALE FOR CERTAIN K12 SCHOOLS

Last year the board approved a unified profile for schools serving both elementary/middle and high school grades. The proposed changes below close a gap in the policy for certain schools in this group.

1. **A K12 school that has insufficient students to be evaluated on the MAP with be evaluated using the scale for high schools.** Schools that fall into this category are those that serve grades K12 but have less than 16 total students in grades K-8, and consequently cannot receive points via MAP. The total points available for these schools are the same as for high schools. Consequently, the schools are evaluated using the high school scale.
2. **A K12 school that has insufficient students to be evaluated on the graduation/dropout rates will be evaluated using the scale for elementary/middle schools.** Schools that fall into this category are those that serve grades K12 but have less than 16 total students in grades 7-12. The total points available for these schools are the same as for elementary schools. Consequently, the schools are evaluated using the elementary school scale.